

### Garamendi lauds area leaders' plastic ban

By Kevin Howe

[Monterey County Herald](#): California should model its public health care system on those of the European countries and nationalize a "confused" and "disjointed" method of paying health care costs, Lt. Gov. John Garamendi said in Monterey on Monday.

Garamendi delivered a keynote address to the 31st annual conference of the 1,100-member Association of California Nurse Leaders at the Monterey Conference Center.

He spoke up for a statewide tax increase to cover its current deficit and an end to the two-thirds majority vote needed for the state Legislature to pass a budget or levy taxes.

"We have the best health care in the world," Garamendi said, "if it were available to all Americans."

Garamendi, who twice served as state Insurance Commissioner, said the major industries that once carried health care costs on their shoulders have jettisoned that burden through bankruptcy, and the social health care contract that began with World War II is unraveling.

European countries and Japan spend about 10 percent of their gross domestic product on health care, he said, while the United States spends about 18 percent. The difference, he said, is in administrative overhead — trying to determine what claims are covered and who should pay for them — in a system that includes "thousands of plans," all of them differing on copayments, benefits, coverage and deductibles. The United States has had universal health care for 41 years — the Medicare program — and a similar system could work nationwide for all ages, he said.

Garamendi said the state budget deficit is "a hole that cannot be filled with cuts," and the state can't make its economy grow by cutting back on education programs and "dumbing down" its work force.

California has an economy approaching \$2 trillion, he said. If 1 percent of that were channeled into state government, the deficit would be erased.

### **The plastic foam question**

In a press conference Monday, Garamendi praised Peninsula cities for their leadership in banning polystyrene plastic food and beverage service containers and for voicing support for a statewide ban on them.

Garamendi congratulated the cities of Carmel, Pacific Grove and Monterey for taking the lead in the county against the plastic products, which he said pollute the environment in a variety of ways.

Last week, Monterey banned the containers, and last year Pacific Grove issued a ban. Carmel Mayor Sue McCloud noted that her city was the first in the county to outlaw polystyrene, or Styrofoam, food containers and beverage cups.

The process of banning plastics in the environment "is in its infancy," said Pacific Grove Mayor Dan Cort. "I'd like to see everything from plastic bags to balloons out of the marine sanctuary."

Pending legislation sponsored by the Clean Water Fund and authored by Assemblymen Jerry Hill, D-San Mateo, and Pedro Nava, D-Santa Barbara, would extend the ban statewide. The legislation is now being reviewed by Legislative Counsel.

Model legislation is being developed by Clean Water Action California, said its state director, Miriam Gordon, and William Merry, general manager of the Monterey Regional Waste management District, offered the visiting lieutenant governor copies of the district's draft model ordinance as well.

Garamendi said he'd like to see an end to the foam plastic "peanuts" used in packaging in favor of more environmentally friendly products.